

It is said that "men may try till dooms-day, they cannot better the New Testament statement of the golden rule. The *selection* has been made." Coleridge says of the great English poet. "You might as well think of pushing a brick or a stone out of a wall with your forefinger, as attempt to remove a word out of any of the finished passages of Shakespeare."

Following no logical order, let us consider some of the advantages to be gained from the study of words and synonyms. Some of these benefits have already been suggested, but they deserve a fuller notice. A student, when asked by his teacher to define the simplest term, may after a few feeble and ineffectual efforts, confess his incompetency to do it. "You have me there, professor," says the crest-fallen student. The poor fellow had a hazy, opaque idea of the word, but not the clear vision that could frame a definition. So the modest request was not complied with. Indeed it is an open secret that a challenge to define may cause hesitancy even in the professedly learned. You might put a class—even a Senior class—to their trumps by asking to give, in the light of their derivations, the difference between two so-called synonymous words. To define, to draw nice distinctions, to classify, require not only the continuous and rigorous exercise of the intellect, but make it imperatively necessary to go to the roots of words to find their radical differences. For you cannot understand the ramifications unless you stand at the roots to see how the words *diverge* or *converge*. This exercise is both a source of mental joy and exhilaration and arms the mind with a defining faculty of immense value. Definition is the condition of precision, and precision is one of the chief virtues of style. If the defining faculty is not strong and sharp, how are precision and accuracy in style to be reached? Almost interminable arguments have taken place between controversialists who never thought of first defining the terms under dispute. If they had first given definitions, there would probably have been no discussion, or at best but a short one. The definer and synonymist selects out of many the word which expresses the very shade and shape of the idea in his mind. Theology, Science, Ethics and Philosophy become absorbingly interesting studies in proportion as the terms of these studies are clearly and accurately defined and distinguished. When this is not done, teacher and pupil must grope in edifying darkness. The secret of large and broad scholarship lies largely in the power and readiness to define and discriminate. Language is not so much accommodated to Philosophy as Philosophy is applied to language.